

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR SHARING KNOWLEDGE ON MfDR INITIATIVES WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES

From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation



Guide
N°13

SYNOPSIS

Knowledge sharing is a key element for developing effective MfDR initiatives, but when it comes to get rural communities into the knowledge sharing process, it is challenging to use common methods and tools. Indeed, rural communities are very often remote and do not have access to modern communication technologies like internet is largely used for knowledge sharing purposes. Therefore, there is a strong need to provide guidelines for addressing the challenge of sharing knowledge with rural communities and introduce the knowledge they produce into conventional knowledge sharing practices. This knowledge product combines well-known knowledge sharing methods and the realities of rural communities in Africa. It provides clear guidelines for knowledge sharing with the rural communities on MfDR initiatives. It proposes a 5-steps process that includes audience analysis, knowledge audit, and analysis of existing communication channels, generating and disseminating knowledge. This process needs to be embedded in the MfDR initiative rather than be considered as an add-on. The process goes beyond the simple transmission of information by integrating it into the overall process of knowledge management.

Introduction

African countries are facing a number of challenges requiring a transformation of how development actions are conducted. To help grow the African transformation agenda, the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP-MfDR) has been launched in 2007 to share and promote the application of MfDR principles for sustainable change in Africa. So far, many initiatives throughout the continent have adopted the Managing for Development Results (MfDR) approach to deliver more results-oriented development. To foster this commitment one of the core objectives of the AfCoP is to enhance knowledge sharing on MfDR. This is very important for African countries, because it enables them to learn from each other and be more effective.

Development practitioners located in urban areas have access to some facilities which make knowledge sharing easier. These facilities include advanced ICTs like internet and smartphones. Unfortunately, rural communities living in remote areas do not have the same access to these facilities. In 2012, internet penetration in Africa was 15.6%, which is too low to focus on internet for knowledge sharing. Therefore knowledge sharing with rural communities who are the most concerned by development issues requires a shift in traditional methods and tools. These guidelines provide pathways for sharing knowledge with rural communities using a set of adapted methods and tools.

Who may use these guidelines?

These guidelines are proposed for people involved in MfDR initiatives who have some interest in sharing their lessons and knowledge with rural communities and also learn from them. It is also generally useful for knowledge management practitioners who want to better exchange with people and institutions located in rural areas with very limited access to advanced ICTs like internet.

Guidelines structure

The guidelines are presented in the following major section entitled “Making it happen”. The section is divided into 5 steps. The first step is related to audience identification and analysis. The second step presents the process for conducting a knowledge audit. The third step introduces a framework for analysing existing communication channels in targeted rural communities. Then the fourth step discusses about generating knowledge and provides some tools. The fifth and final step is about disseminating captured knowledge, where some communication channels have been proposed.

Making it happen

Developing an efficient knowledge sharing strategy within an MfDR initiative involves a number of steps that need to be considered. This section illustrates these steps.

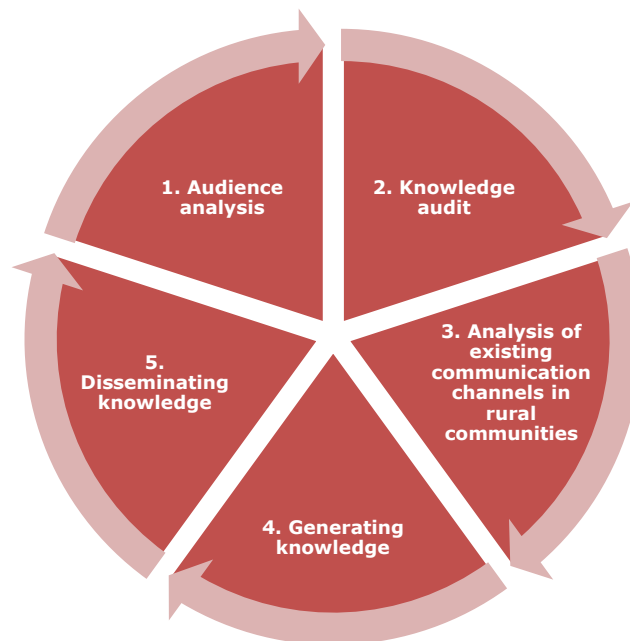


Figure 1: 5-step knowledge sharing process

Knowledge sharing should be considered as a learning process. Each step should be implemented in a dynamic way to allow feedback. The process can be at the fourth step and then get back to the second step to review the elements and refine the strategy.

STEP 1: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

A critical step in developing and implementing an effective knowledge sharing strategy is the identification of the audience. The audience defines what knowledge is needed, in what form it should be packaged and how it will be disseminated. Rural communities constitute the audience in the case of these guidelines. But there is a large variety in the audience made of rural communities. For example, local governments located

in rural areas and farmers are in need of different kinds of knowledge and have access to different communication channels. Therefore it is important to identify the targeted audience and carry out an analysis to better understand them. The table below provides a framework for such analysis.

Table 1: Framework for audience analysis

	Audience 1	Audience 2	Audience 3
Brief description			
Number			
Location			
Specific needs			
Current level of knowledge			
How will they apply the knowledge			
Media they have access to			

It is recommended to avoid having more than 3 audiences for a specific knowledge sharing strategy, one is the most appropriate. For more than one audience a further analysis should be done to identify similarities in order to mutualize actions.

STEP 2: KNOWLEDGE AUDIT

A knowledge audit (K-Audit) is an effort to understand where an organization stands in terms of knowledge management and its knowledge assets. It serves as the preparatory phase in any knowledge management initiative. Properly done, it would provide accurate identification, quantification, measurement and assessment of the total sum of tacit and explicit knowledge in the organization (Ann Hylton, 2002). In that sense it refers to the process to identify every knowledge produced by an organization, who produces and uses it, how frequent is the knowledge used, and where is the knowledge stored. It is primarily applicable at the organization level but its principles and methods can be applied in the case of initiatives like MfDR projects or programmes. Knowledge audit applied to an MfDR initiative will help to analyse knowledge needs, existing knowledge assets and resources. This is crucial in developing an effective knowledge sharing strategy for the initiative.

To implement a knowledge audit for an MfDR initiative, a framework designed by Sharma & Chowdhury, (2007) is proposed through 4 components.



Figure 2: Principal Components of a K-Audit (Sharma & Chowdhury, 2007)

These four steps of the K-Audit should be developed while keeping in mind that the outcome of the process will serve to rural communities. Therefore, the analysis must focus on elements that are relevant to rural communities. These elements are already identified during the first step.

K-Needs analysis

This task will identify with precision what knowledge the MfDR initiative and its people possess (or can generate) and what knowledge targeted rural communities are in need of that can be provided by the initiative. For example, a project may be currently developing activities related to environmental protection, the Knowledge-Needs analysis will help to identify how to effectively mainstream environmental protection issues into planning and budgeting as knowledge to be generated and used by remote local governments. The Knowledge-Needs analysis should also examine the current gaps in knowledge and any misalignment with the objective of the project or organization.

K-Inventory analysis

Knowledge-Inventory is a knowledge stock-taking to identify and locate knowledge assets and resources throughout the entire organization implementing the initiative. It comprises of 2 entities: Physical (explicit) Knowledge inventory and Corporate Experts (sources of tacit knowledge) inventory (Sharma & Chowdhury, 2007).

The physical (explicit) knowledge inventory includes:

- Numbers, types and categories of documents, databases, libraries, intranet websites, links and subscriptions to external resources
- Knowledge locations in the organization, and in its various systems
- The organization and access to the knowledge (how knowledge resources are organized and how easy it is for people to find and access them?)
- Purpose, relevance and quality of knowledge (why do these resources exist, and how relevant and appropriate they are for that purpose, are they of good quality - up to date, reliable, evidence based, making sense, relevance to the organization?)
- Usage of the knowledge (are they actually being used by whom, when, what for and how often?)

The Corporate Experts (source of tacit knowledge) inventory includes:

- Team members professional qualifications, skills & core competency levels and experience
- Mentoring opportunities
- Practice of exit interviews
- Training and learning opportunities
- Future leadership potential

The K-inventory analysis may involve a series of surveys and interviews in order to get relevant answers to the above questions on both tacit and explicit knowledge that an organization or a specific initiative may hold or have. Knowledge gaps may be identified at this level of the knowledge audit by making comparisons between the knowledge inventory and the earlier analysis of knowledge needs.

K-Flow analysis

The Knowledge-Flow analysis examines how knowledge currently moves around the initiative or the organization, how it moves from the organization to the users (internal and external). In other words, it helps to determine how people managing an initiative find knowledge; how they share it and the barriers they face in dealing with the knowledge. Such an analysis looks at people, processes and systems (Sharma

& Chowdhury, 2007). It will examine the habits and behaviours of people in generating, accessing and sharing knowledge. In addition, it will examine technical infrastructure in place or potential for accessing and sharing knowledge. An analysis of knowledge will give a valuable insight on how knowledge is accessible and existing barriers to identify the best options to get the knowledge to rural communities.

K-Mapping

This task is somehow the summarized version of the earlier tasks mentioned. The K-Map will represent the overall situation of the organization or initiative in terms of knowledge. It shows the knowledge assets, resources and flows. The K-Map can be delivered as a visual representation of the initiative’s knowledge status.

STEP 3: ANALYSIS OF EXISTING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural communities have access to some communication channels that can be used to disseminate knowledge. Communication channels in rural communities can include rural/community radio, newspapers, television, informal meetings, drama, etc. These are of diverse form and operate differently. Therefore it is important to have a better understanding of these media in order to tailor the knowledge sharing strategy to fit the needs and conditions of targeted audience.

Table 2: Framework for analysing existing communication channels in rural communities

<i>Channel (which communication channel exists in the community?)</i>	<i>Audience (what is the reach of that channel?)</i>	<i>Frequency (How often does the channel operate?)</i>	<i>Services (In what purpose is the channel used?)</i>	<i>Considerations (What particular thing should be taken into account to use that channel)</i>
Channel 1				
Channel 2...				

This framework will help to understand what media targeted audience has access to and how they operate.

STEP 4: GENERATING KNOWLEDGE

Generating knowledge can be simple or complex depending on where knowledge is going to be generated from. Knowledge can be generated from a project, a research, an initiative or just an experience. Any information produced that becomes useful to accomplish something is knowledge. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that a project, research or initiative do not systematically generate valuable knowledge. There is a strong need to develop some methods to capture the knowledge that comes from their implementation.

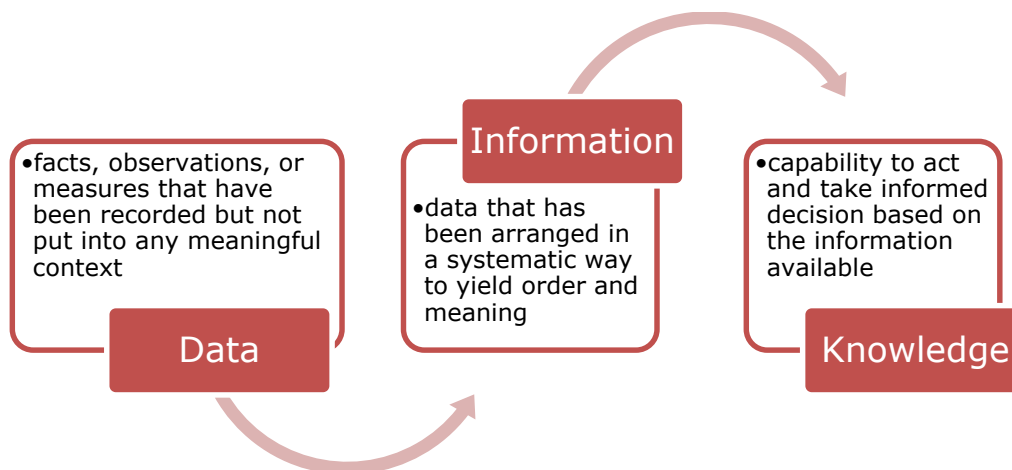


Figure 3: From data to knowledge

This figure shows the relationship data-information-knowledge. This relationship should always be kept in mind by those implementing MfDR initiatives so that they won't confuse them and keep knowledge-focused. We are presenting below 2 methods (Knowledge harvesting and After Action Review) that can be applied in MfDR initiatives to help to capture lessons learnt and generate knowledge.

Knowledge harvesting¹

Knowledge harvesting is an approach that allows to capture and document the tacit knowledge or know-how of the members of an organization or a project. Tacit knowledge, at the opposite of explicit knowledge, which is easily captured and shared is more experiential and intuitive and so is not easy to be captured. Developing a knowledge harvesting approach may help in unveiling the tacit knowledge and making it more explicit. In other words, the approach objective is to extract the knowledge from the heads of few people and make it available to a larger community. While there is no set formula for knowledge harvesting, there are some general guidelines that facilitate the process. These can be broken down into a number of steps.

- **Focus:** it helps you identify the critical knowledge that is most urgent and important to capture.
- **Understand your target audience:** It is important to understand who will be using the knowledge that you are capturing before you start to capture it. This will help you ensure you capture the right knowledge at the right level, and make it available in the most appropriate ways. This task should have already been done in the Step1 of the present guidelines.
- **Identify the "experts"** - the people who have the knowledge and know-how you are seeking to capture. Do keep in mind that everyone can have some knowledge to be captured.
- **Choose your harvesters:** An effective harvester (interviewer) is crucial. Making tacit knowledge explicit can be difficult – people often don't "know what they know" and so helping people to talk about what they know, and then capturing that effectively, is a key skill.
- **Harvest: interview your experts:** The best way to capture tacit knowledge is using one-to-one, face-to-face interviews with your experts. The interviews will involve asking them to talk about what they do and to describe specific situations in which they have applied specific know-how.

¹ More at <http://learningwithwikis.wikispaces.com/Knowledge+Harvesting>

Interviews need to be well prepared in advance, including drafting a topic guide and a list of questions.

After Action Review

An After Action Review (AAR) is a simple process used by a team to capture the lessons learned during or after a project, an initiative or an event. It helps to reveal the successes and failures that can be used by the team or other people to improve their performance. The After Action Review (AAR) is a simple but powerful tool to help identify lessons learnt and therefore generate valuable knowledge that can be shared. It is an interesting tool that can be used in MfDR initiatives for more development results.

Box 1: Focus questions and features of an AAR

Questions	Features
1. What was expected to happen?	• An open and honest professional discussion
2. What actually occurred?	• Participation by everyone on the team
3. What went well and why?	• A focus on results
4. What can be improved and how?	• Identification of ways to sustain what was done well • Development of recommendations on ways to overcome obstacles

There are two types of AAR. Formal AARs which require more resources and involve more detailed planning, coordination, logistical support, supplies, and time for facilitation and report preparation. It also requires an external facilitator who will guide the discussion using the four above questions. But informal AARs can also be performed. They are usually conducted immediately following the concerned event, project or program. They require less preparation, planning, time to be carried out.

AARs can be conducted in person or online, either asynchronously (meaning you don't have to be online at the same time with email or web forums) or synchronously (meaning you are online or on the phone at the same time).

Table 3: Implementing an AAR (From Chris Collison's Learning to Fly)

1	Hold the AAR immediately. AAR's are carried out immediately whilst all of the participants are still available, and their memories are fresh. Learning can then be applied right away.
2	Create the right climate. The ideal climate for an AAR to be successful is one of openness and commitment to learning. Everyone should participate in an atmosphere free from the concept of seniority or rank. AARs are learning events rather than critiques.
3	Appoint a facilitator. The facilitator of an AAR is not there to have answers, but to help the team to learn answers. People must be drawn out, both for their own learning and the group's learning.
4	Ask "what was supposed to happen?" The facilitator should start by dividing the event into discrete activities, each of which had (or should have had) an identifiable objective and plan of action. The discussion begins with the first activity: "What was supposed to happen?"

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- 5 **Ask “what actually happened?”** This means the team must understand and agree facts about what happened. Remember, though, that the aim is to identify a problem not a culprit.
 - 6 **Now compare the plan with reality.** The real learning begins as the team compares the plan to what actually happened in reality and determines “Why were there differences?” and ‘What did we learn?’ Identify and discuss successes and shortfalls. Put in place action plans to sustain the successes and to improve upon the shortfalls.
 - 7 **Record the key points.** Recording the key elements of an AAR clarifies what happened and compares it to what was supposed to happen. It facilitates sharing of learning experiences and provides the basis for a broader learning programme.
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To summarize, conducting an AAR refers to mobilize the team and stakeholders in order to provide knowledgeable responses to the 4 questions mentioned above (Box 1). The outcome of the process should be reported in terms of lessons learnt and knowledge generated.

STEP 5: DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE

The steps discussed above should lead to a better understanding of the knowledge sharing process with generated knowledge that will be packaged and disseminated. Knowledge dissemination in rural communities does not involve the same tools and methods used to reach out to urban communities because, of infrastructure gaps and socio-cultural considerations. In this guide, a set of tools and methods is proposed to adapt to rural communities situation. These involve rural radio/community radio talk shows, participative video, music & theatre, community information centers, peer-assist and village assembly.

Rural/community radio

Despite the latest technological advances in telecommunications, which increase the use of new tools like internet, radio is still the most pervasive, accessible and affordable mass media available particularly in rural areas. In some conditions, it is the only media that can be used to rapidly disseminate information to a large rural audience. Therefore radio represents a critical tool to use for knowledge sharing with rural communities. Knowledge can be packaged as radio broadcasts (mainly in local languages) to be disseminated. Lessons learnt from rural radio promotion programmes showed that a two-way communication should be promoted to call for the active participation of rural communities in the planning and production of these broadcasts. As a feedback rural radio broadcasts can be converted into podcasts that can be shared on online platforms like the AfCoP platform.

Box 2: Farm Radio International promoting rural radio for farmers

Since 1979, Farm Radio International² has been supporting African broadcasters to meet the needs of smallholder farmers and their families in rural communities, while helping broadcasters build the skills they need to develop content that responds to local needs. Based in Ottawa, Canada, the organization works with over 300 radio practitioners in 39 African countries.

² <http://www.farmradio.org/>

Participative video

Video can be a good tool for knowledge sharing about MfDR initiatives in rural areas. Stories about successful MfDR initiatives can be translated into videos. There are some possibilities today to make low cost videos without advanced technical skills. These videos can be made available at community information centers. Video is also a good way to learn from rural areas about initiatives they are implementing. Participative video approach can be used to make rural communities produce videos themselves. These can also be shared on internet for a large use.

Music and theatre

Music and theatre are in some case interesting traditional communication channel that can be used. The objective is to translate existing knowledge into a music or theatre piece, that is entertaining, educational and an opportunity to mainstream local realities. Professional artists and actors can be employed in order to mentor the local performers and to elevate the performance level. Music and theatre can create follow up interviews from the audience and post show discussions which will engage rural communities and promote learning.

Community Information Center

The Community Information Center also known as info center or telecenter is a space where varied and useful information for the development of the local communities is stored and accessed. Such space gives access to ICT tools that are not largely available. Computers, library, television and even internet are made available for rural communities. ICT literate people are available to guide rural people to have access to the information they need. Knowledge can be packaged in different formats and made available at the community information center. One of the major problems faced by this type of communication channel is sustainability, both in economic terms as well as in social and cultural terms. One of the keys to sustainability is through a true appropriation by the community and the alignment of information and knowledge provided with their needs.

Peer-Assist

Peer Assist is a simple knowledge sharing method used to promote peer learning on a specific topic. It helps to bring together a group of peers to elicit feedback on a problem, project, or activity, and draw lessons from the participants' knowledge and experience. It can be an interesting method to promote exchange of knowledge with rural communities. To do so, a specific audience in rural communities which is in need of some knowledge can convene a workshop with the people of an organization or project who may have the needed knowledge to share. The workshop should ideally have 3 to 10 participants to make collaboration easier. The people of the organization or project who may have some knowledge to share will give feedback about their experience on the issue. Through a collaborative discussion everyone will learn from each other and gain new know-how. It is worth using a peer assist when a team is facing a challenge, where the knowledge and experience of others will really help.

Box 3: How to use a Peer Assist³

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- **Communicate the purpose and make sure all participants are on board.**
 - **Share your Peer Assist plans with others. Consider whether others have already solved the problem; they may have similar needs.**
 - **Identify a facilitator external to the team. The facilitator is responsible for managing the process so that meeting participants reach the desired outcome.**
 - **Invite potential participants who have the diversity of skills, competencies and experience needed for the Peer Assist.**
 - **Be clear on what you want out of the Peer Assist (usually options and insights) and plan the time to achieve them.**
 - **Plan the event to allow a balance between telling and listening.**
 - **Listen for understanding and for how you might improve your own activity.**
 - **Consider others who might benefit from this knowledge, then share it with them.**
 - **Commit to actions and keep the Peer Assist team updated.**
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Village assembly

The village assembly is recognized as an effective means of communication: it allows physical contact, gives the opportunity to discuss and ensure feedback. The village assembly gathers members from village interest groups and village residents. Village assemblies should be convening in conformity with village realities in order to have a large and well-targeted audience. For example a village assembly with farmers should consider farming time and market days in its schedule. The meeting can also be used as a means to showcase the different knowledge materials produced with the tools and methods presented earlier (radio broadcasts, videos, music and theatre pieces, etc.).

³ From <http://www.kstoolkit.org/Peer+Assists>

Conclusion

It is very important to include a knowledge generating and sharing strategy in MfDR initiatives. Mainstreaming it will help to learn from each other and avoid reinventing the wheel. These guidelines provide methods and tools to meet the challenge of promoting knowledge in rural areas. It proposes a 5-step process that includes audience analysis, knowledge audit analysis of existing communication channels, generating knowledge and disseminating knowledge. The process should be implemented in a learning way so that it is evaluated and improved while doing.



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This knowledge series intends to summarize good practices and key policy findings on managing for development results (MfDR). African Community of Practice (AfCoP) knowledge products are widely disseminated and are available on the website of the Africa for Results initiative, at: www.afrik4r.org/page/resources.

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